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Catalyst for Revolutio

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

1773

Gover...

by BENJAMIN W. LABAREE

Massachusetts
Bicentennial Commission Publication
December, 1973

Catalyst for Revolution

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BOSTON, December 1, 1773.

At a Meeting of the PEOPLE *of* Boston, *and the neighbouring Towns, at* Faneuil-Hall, *in said* Boston, *on Monday the 29th of* November 1773, *Nine o'Clock, A. M. and continued by Adjournment to the next Day; for the Purpose of consulting, agreeing and determining upon the most proper and effectual Method to prevent the unloading, receiving or vending the detestable* TEA *sent out by the East-India Company, Part of which being just arrived in this Harbour:*

IN Order to proceed with due Regularity, it was moved that a Moderator be chosen, and

JONATHAN WILLIAMS, Esq; Was then elected Moderator of the Meeting

A MOTION was made that as the Town of Boston had determined at a late Meeting legally assembled, that they would to the utmost of their Power prevent the landing of the Tea, the Question be put, Whether the Body are absolutely determined that the Tea now arrived in Capt. Hall shall be returned to the Place from whence it came at all Hazards? And the Question being accordingly put, it passed in the Affirmative. Nem. Con.

It appearing that the Hall would not contain the People assembled, it was Voted that the Meeting be immediately Adjourned to the Old South Meeting House, Leave having been obtained for that Purpose.

The People met at the Old South accordingly.

A Motion was made and the Question put, Whether it was the Sense of this Body that the Tea shall not only be sent back, but that the Duty also be paid thereon, & passed in the Affirmative. Nem. Con.

It was moved that in order to give Time to the Committee to consider and deliberate, but previous to their Report, a Question should be put, as they had given Notice to act, it would have been done at the opening of the Meeting, there must be an Adjournment to Three o'Clock, P. M. and the Meeting was accordingly for that Purpose adjourned.

THREE o'Clock, P. M. met according to Adjournment

A Motion was made, Whether the Tea now arrived in Captain Hall's Ship shall be sent back to the same Bottom—Passed in the Affirmative, Nem. Con.

Mr Rotch the Owner of the Vessel being present, it was said that he should enter his Protest against the Proceedings.

It was then moved and voted, unanimously That Mr Rotch be directed not to enter the Tea; and that each Day of it would be at his Peril.

And Voted, That Captain Hall the Master of the Ship, be informed that at his Peril he is not to suffer any of the Tea brought by him, to be landed.

A Motion was made, That in Order for the Security of Captain Hall's Ship and Cargo, a Watch may be appointed—and it was Voted that a Watch be accordingly appointed in consist of 25 Men.

Capt Edward Proctor was appointed by the Body to be the Captain of the Watch for this Night, and the Names were given in to the Moderator, of the Twenty-five who were Volunteers on the Occasion.

It having been observed to the Body, that Governor Hutchinson had required the Justices of the Peace in this Town to meet and use their Endeavours to suppress any Route or Riots, &c. that might happen.—It was Moved and Voted to put the Question, Whether it be not the Sense of this Meeting that the Governor's Conduct herein carries a designed Reflection upon the People here met, and is highly calculated to freeze the Veins of Administration—Passed in the Affirmative, nem. con.

The People being informed by Col. Hancock, that Sir Joseph Yorke in Law to Mr Clarke's Son had communicated him that the Tea Consignees did not intend to have it landed from London till the last Evening, and were therefore of Opinion that they should not have a Town Meeting every Day to make Enquiry at the Time intended, as there was no Occasion for a further Notice for that Purpose.

The Meeting out of great Tenderness to these Persons, and from a strong Desire to bring this Matter to a Conclusion, notwithstanding the Time they had hitherto expended upon them to that Purpose, were prevailed upon to adjourn to the next Morning Nine o'Clock.

TUESDAY Morning Nine o'Clock Met according to Adjournment

THE long expected Dispatch were at length brought into the Meeting, not directed to the Consignees, but to John Scollay, Esq. one of the Selectmen—It was however voted that the same should be read, and they are as follow, viz.

London, Aug. 29th, 1773.

SIR,

WE are sorry that we could not return to the Town satisfactory Answers to their two last Messages to us respecting the Teas; we beg Leave to acquaint the Gentlemen Selectmen that we have since received our Orders from the Honorable East-India Company.

We shall retain a Disposition to do all in our Power to give Satisfaction to the Town, but as we understand Messrs Clarke have wrote you full Satisfaction, that they can be entitled to nothing in the Case to take back the Teas, we beg Leave to say that those are the utmost of our Power [illegible] Readiness to meet the Town [illegible] Teas [illegible] Duty [illegible] Dispatch [illegible] Directors [illegible] Duty [illegible] Directors [illegible] Duty [illegible] Directors [illegible] Duty

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

The Boston Tea Party is one of the best-known incidents in American history, ranking in fame with Columbus' voyages, the landing of the Pilgrims, and a few battles like Lexington and Concord. In foreign countries it is perhaps the only fact associated with the town of Boston. This fame is well deserved, for the Boston Tea Party was the catalyst that precipitated the American War of Independence.

It is worth our while, therefore, to examine more closely why this dramatic event came about. The Boston Tea Party resulted from the interplay of at least four important historical factors: first, the social fact that American colonists drank tea, and in large quantities; second, the political fact that the British Parliament taxed this tea; third, the economic fact that the East India Company had difficulty selling its tea both at home and in the colonies; and fourth, the human fact that men charged with governmental responsibility during the tea crisis of 1773-1774 made what in retrospect can be seen as unwise decisions. It is equally important to understand how this episode led to the outbreak of war.

Tea first became popular in England during the course of the eighteenth century. In 1757 Samuel Johnson described himself as "a hardened and shameless Tea-drinker, who has for twenty years diluted his meals with only the infusion of this fascinating plant; whose kettle has scarcely time to cool, who with Tea amuses the evening, with Tea solaces the midnight, and with Tea welcomes the morning." Wherever Englishmen went in the world, they took their tea-drinking habit with them, and so it is not surprising that tea was also popular in the American colonies. By the 1760's Americans consumed each year as much as 1,200,000 pounds of tea, at a rate of at least three-quarters of a pound per capita.

By law the East India Company had a monopoly over the importation of tea from China into Great Britain. After 1721 the American colonies could import tea only from the mother country. But the British government soon discovered that the tea trade was an excellent source of revenue, and during the first half of the eighteenth century tariff after tariff was levied on the importation and sale of tea until by the 1750's the duties amounted to about a hundred per cent ad valorem. While this policy netted the government a considerable revenue, it had a disastrous effect on the East India Company's tea trade. In comparison, tea imported into Holland by the Dutch East India Company was exempt from government duties there and sold for about half the price of English tea. A lively smuggling trade therefore developed, and by 1770 about 7,000,000 pounds of Dutch tea found its way into England each year, to the consternation of Company authorities.

Large quantities of Dutch tea were smuggled into the American colonies as well, averaging as much as 900,000 pounds a year during the middle of the eighteenth century and representing about three-quarters of all the tea consumed there. Profits for illicit traders were immense, and the nature of the American coastline made strict enforcement impossible. Besides, there were never enough customs officials to do the job, and those who tried were subjected to the bullying and insults of waterfront mobs.

The British ministry had of course been well aware of the problem of smuggling both at home and in the colonies. In 1767 Parliament finally enacted legislation to remedy the situation in regard to tea. Called the Indemnity Act, the law among other things allowed for the next five years a full drawback of the English customs duty on all tea exported to America to encourage the legitimate tea trade with the colonies. When the Act took effect in July of that year, therefore, the East India Company was put on a more equitable footing with its continental competitors than ever before. Tea for the American market which had cost 2s. 9d. in London now sold for 2s. 1d. Imports of English tea into the colonies increased immediately, and in 1768 over 800,000 pounds were sent to America, the largest amount ever.

Whatever hopes the East India Company and the honest colonial merchants entertained about a prosperous future, however, were quick-

ly dashed by another act passed by Parliament in 1767. The Townshend Act grew out of the financial crisis that had plagued British ministries since the end of the Seven Years' War. Saddled with the expense of maintaining an army in America and of supporting numerous governmental officials there, Britons not surprisingly looked to the colonies for a source of revenue. Their first effort, the Stamp Act, was repealed in 1766 after less than a year because of violent American protests. The following year the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend, offered another means of raising a revenue in America. By his act duties were collected in the colonies on a number of commodities commonly imported from the mother country. By far the most important of these was tea, which was subjected to a duty of three-pence per pound.

The issue of "no taxation without representation," which rallied colonial opposition to the new act, focused on the tea-duty, for of all the newly-taxed commodities, tea was the most commonly used. Agreements signed by merchants not to import British manufactures were quickly supplemented by anti-tea-drinking pledges circulated through the towns and villages of America. Various local substitutes for English tea were publicized by the patriots, including "Labradore tea," made from the redroot bush. Ladies drank the new concoction at parish spinning bees and proclaimed its virtues in the local press. The campaign featured newspaper doggerel like the following verse addressed to the ladies of Boston.

Throw aside your Bohea and your Green Hyson Tea,
And all things with a new fashioned duty;
Procure a good store of the choice Labradore,
For there'll soon be enough here to suit ye;
These do without fear, and to all you'll appear
Fair, charming, true, lovely, and clever;
Though the times remain darkish, young men may be sparkish,
And love you much stronger than ever.

It is difficult to tell just how effective the campaign against dutied tea was. To be sure, assertions were confidently made that the market for English tea had virtually disappeared by the middle of the year 1769. Evidence beneath the surface, however, indicates that the anti-tea movement was less than fully successful in many parts of the colonies. For one thing, patriots found it necessary to

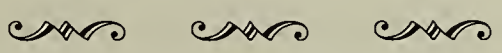
institute new rounds of anti-tea pledges at frequent intervals and to stir up town meetings to adopt new series of resolutions proscribing the baneful herb.

Contrary to popular belief much the worst offender in the importation of dutied tea from England during this period was the town of Boston. There are two principal reasons for this. First was the fact that Bostonians had never been particularly successful in establishing permanent smuggling routes to Holland. Colonists in other provinces could patriotically swear off dutied tea without the agony of abandoning their favorite beverage, for they continued to be supplied by the New York smugglers. For Bostonians to go without English tea, however, meant that many would have to give up the habit altogether. A second reason, and perhaps more important, was the presence in Boston of two particularly obstinate mercantile firms, Richard Clarke & Sons and the partnership of Thomas & Elisha Hutchinson, sons of Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Not until the spring of 1770 did the latter firm finally agree to cease importations of dutied tea and other articles. In the meantime their house alone imported more than 50,000 pounds of dutied tea. In contrast to the situation at Boston the agreements against importing dutied tea at New York and Philadelphia were virtually airtight. For the year 1770 only 147 pounds of legal tea entered at the former port and a skimpy 65 pounds at the latter.

In the spring of 1770 Parliament repealed the Townshend duties on all commodities save tea. Lord North insisted on the retention of that levy as a symbol of Parliament's authority to tax the Americans. With great effort the American patriots attempted to continue their nonimportation agreements in hope of forcing repeal of the tea-duty as well, but to no avail. By the fall of 1770 merchants in the last of the ports had abandoned their boycott of British goods with the important exception of English tea, which patriots all agreed should be blacklisted as long as the duty remained in force.

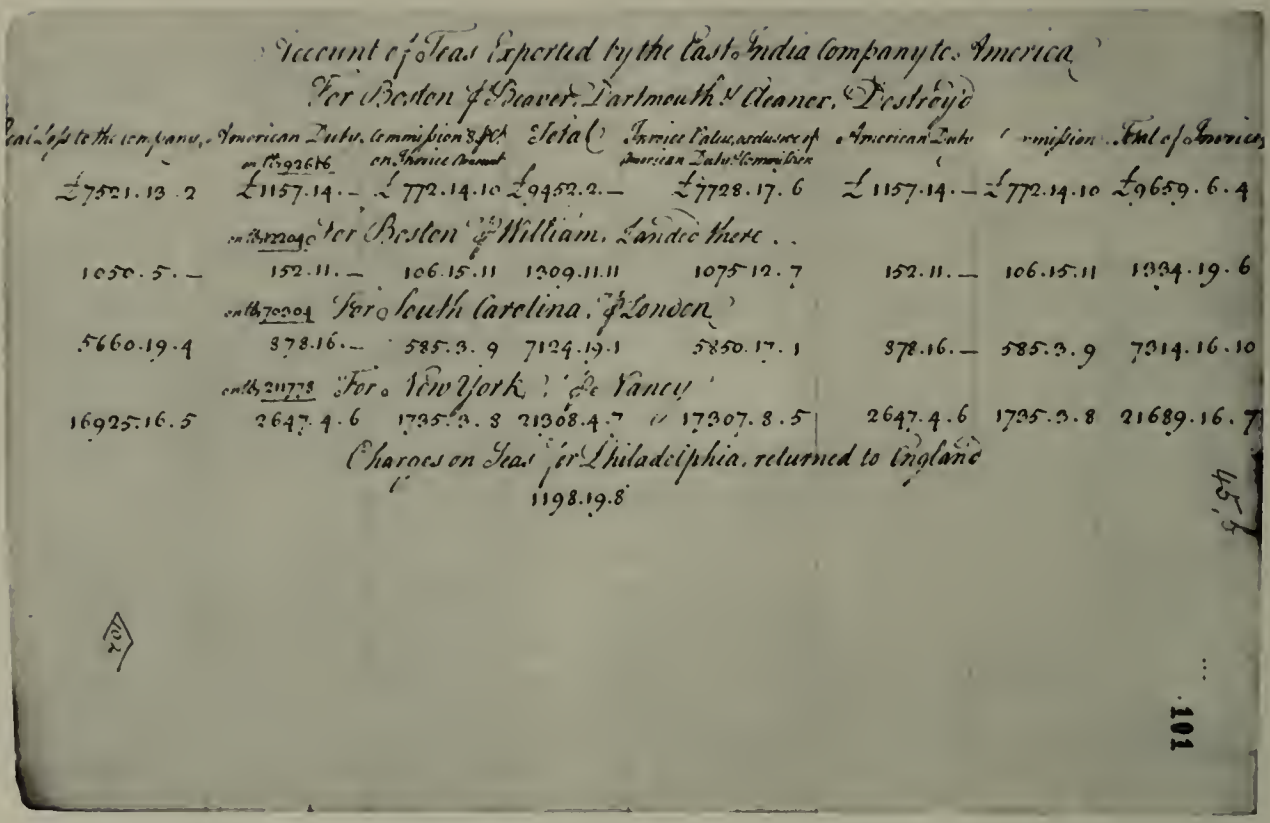
In most parts of America the continuing ban on dutied tea was quite effective. At New York and Philadelphia together only 1,000 pounds were imported from England during the years 1771 and 1772. Continuation of the duty after 1770, in short, had seriously curtailed the potential market for English tea in America. The only exception was at Boston, where in the two years 1771 and 1772 a total of over 400,000 pounds of dutied tea entered. The Clarkes and the Hutchinsons accounted for much of this tea, but a number of staunch

patriots like John Hancock and Oliver Wendell were apparently also involved. These leaks in the Boston patriots' defenses would later come back to haunt them.



The crisis came in the fall of 1773 on the issue of dutied tea. The East India Company was in dire financial straits largely because of its expensive operations in Bengal but also because of inefficiency and corruption. The smuggling of tea into England from the Continent had continued at an accelerated pace through the 1760's, and by the spring of 1773 the Company had a surplus of 17,000,000 pounds in its warehouses. A minor stockholder named Robert Herries proposed that the Company be allowed to export some of this tea on its own account to Europe with a drawback on all English duties so that it could be offered there at a price competitive with Dutch tea. Fear that such cheap tea would simply be smuggled back into England convinced the Company officials to ask instead that they be allowed to ship some of their surplus to America. Lord North and the Parliament agreed to the plan in the spring of 1773, perhaps partly because much of the Company's debt was owed to the Government. But in approving the Tea Act he and his supporters refused to repeal the Townshend duty, as Opposition leaders urged them to do. "If you don't take off the duty," warned one member prophetically, "they [the Americans] won't take the tea."

Lord North knew that the potential market for English tea in the colonies was enormous, as much as 2,000,000 pounds a year if the price were low enough. Furthermore, he knew that large quantities of dutied tea had been imported at Boston, more than 600,000 pounds of it since passage of the Townshend Act more than five years before. He concluded, not illogically, that most Americans would not seriously object to the duty if English tea could be made competitive with the tea smuggled from Holland. The East India Company in fact planned to offer Bohea at 2s. 0d. per pound wholesale through its agents in the colonies. Smugglers of Dutch tea would be hard pressed to match the price in the winter of 1773, although by the following spring the price at Amsterdam in fact dropped sufficiently to make such competition once again possible. Lord North was therefore hopeful that at long last the Townshend duty would provide the revenue for which it was originally intended. In the early fall of 1773 the East India Company sent off



Account of Teas Exported by the East India Company to America
For Boston & Beaver. Dartmouth & Eleanor. Destroy'd

Real Loss to the Company	American Duty. Commission 3 p Ct on £92616	Total	Invoice Value, exclusive of American Duty & Commission	American Duty	Commission	Total of Invoices
£7521.13.2	£1157.14.—	£772.14.10	£9452.2.—	£7728.17.6	£1157.14.—	£772.14.10 £9659.6.4

on £22046 For Boston & William. Landed there

1050.5.—	152.11.—	106.15.11	1309.11.11	1075.12.7	152.11.—	106.15.11	1334.19.6

on £70004 For South Carolina. & London

5660.19.4	378.16.—	585.3.9	7124.19.1	5850.17.1	378.16.—	585.3.9	7314.16.10

on £21778 For New York & the Vance

16925.16.5	2647.4.6	1735.3.8	21308.4.7	17307.8.5	2647.4.6	1735.3.8	21689.16.7

Charges on Teas for Philadelphia. returned to England
1198.19.8

45 8

101

Lawless Rabble went on board on the Arrival
thereof and stood & threw into the Harbour the
whole of the said Cargoes of Tea, after securing the
Officers of the Customs on board of the said Ships to
guard the same & goon Shore; whilst they
perpetrated their violent and illegal Proceedings

That the East India Company's Loss on this
account, together with the Freight which they are
obliged to pay, will amount, according to the said
annexed account, to the Sum of three Thousand Six
Hundred Sixty nine Pounds Six Shillings and four
Pence; and as it arises entirely from your Memorialists Servants
who were employed in carrying on a fair & legal Trade, to prevent
the Consequences of such an Insurrection,

Your Memorialists, on behalf of themselves & all
others concerned in the said Trade, humbly
beg leave to request Your Lordships to lay their Case
before His Majesty, that His Majesty will be
graciously pleased to pursue such Measures, or
give such Directions, for the Indemnity of the East
India Company, respecting their said Loss, as to His
Majesty, in His great Equity and Wisdom, shall
seem meet

And your Memorialists shall ever pray

East India House
London 16th Febry 1774.

(Sd)

An Account of the Invoiced Amount of Teas exported to Boston
New England by the United East India Company, Consigned to
Messrs Thomas & Elisha Hutchinson, Benjamin Faneuil junr
Joshua Winslow, and Richard Clarke & Sons, Merchants.

Per Beaver Hezekiah Coffin, Master

					£	s	d	
Tea Bohea	90 Chests	contain	14286	lbs.	2			£2062.10.
Single (Congou)	20			1637		2	3	218.3.4
Hyson	5			300		5		92.—
Congou	5			432		2	3	58.12.—
Souchong	2			120		3		20.16.—
								3245.1.4

Per Dartmouth, James Hall Master

					£	s	d	
Tea Bohea	90 Chests	contain	13161	lbs.	2			£2016.2.—
Single (Congou)	20			1596		2	8	212.16.—
Hyson	5			370		5	—	92.10.—
Souchong	4			276		3	—	51.9.—
Congou	5			420		2	3	68.3.—
								3210.19.—

Per Eleanor James Bruce, Master

					£	s	d	
Tea Bohea	90 Chests	contain	13815	lbs.	2			£2007.9
Single Hyson	20			1589		3	—	190.7.—
Hyson	5			984		5	—	96.—
Souchong	4			270		3	—	40.10.—
Congou	5			536		2	3	69.1.—
								3203.6.—

Grand £9659.6.4

600,000 pounds of dutied tea to four American ports: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. There each shipment was consigned to a group of merchants whose names had been suggested to the Company by English merchants who traded with Americans.

The colonists learned of the impending arrival of the Company's tea in early October 1773. Gradually at first, then with increasing momentum a protest movement swept through the seaports. Inflammatory pamphlets appeared at New York; a mass meeting convened at Philadelphia; Boston patriots caught the fever and aroused their followers to oppose the scheme. In the beginning the smugglers of tea at New York and Philadelphia undoubtedly took a leading role in the protest, railing against the dangers of monopoly inherent in the East India Company's plan. But popular resentment grew out of the fact that the tea was subject to the hated Townshend duty. All the earlier arguments against English tea were now revived with a vengeance, and the whole question of Parliamentary taxation in America was reopened. Many patriots saw in the shipment a devilish plot between the Company and the Ministry to tempt the colonists into recognizing Parliament's claims by offering them cheap but dutied tea. The American susceptibility to the conspiracy theory of history made this argument particularly appealing.

By mid-November 1773, the inhabitants were thoroughly aroused. At both Philadelphia and New York the consignees of the tea publicly resigned their commissions when the authorities failed to intercede in their behalf. But at Boston quite a different situation developed. In the first place, several of the consignees were closely related to Governor Hutchinson, including his own sons. Secondly, the Governor was in no mood to give in to the demands of the patriots that the tea be returned to England as soon as it arrived. After many years of struggle with the likes of Sam Adams, he had reached the end of his patience. Most recently, in the summer of 1773, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay had passed a resolution demanding the removal from office of both the governor and lieutenant governor. Hutchinson was ready for a show-down. He had good reason to think that he could win this contest, for at Boston were stationed two regiments of troops, several ships of the British fleet, and the office of the Customs Commissioners. British authority seemed well established. The patriots, on the other hand, were equally determined to force the issue. Embarrassed by recent disclosures that large quantities of dutied tea had entered at Boston in recent years, Adams and his sup-

Massachusetts Historical Society's Broadside Collection No. 1661

BOSTON, December 2, 1773.

WHEREAS it has been reported that a Permit will be given by the Cuſtom-Houſe for Landing the Tea now on Board a Veſſel laying in this Harbour, commanded by Capt. HALL: THIS is to Remind the Publick, That it was ſolemnly voted by the Body of the People of this and the neighbouring Towns aſſembled at the Old-South Meeting-Houſe on Tueſday the 30th Day of *November*, that the ſaid Tea never ſhould be landed in this Province, or pay one Farthing of Duty: And as the aiding or aſſiſting in procuring or granting any ſuch Permit for landing the ſaid Tea or any other Tea ſo circumſtanced, or in offering any Permit when obtained to the Maſter or Commander of the ſaid Ship, or any other Ship in the ſame Situation, muſt betray an inhuman Thirſt for Blood, and will alſo in a great Meaſure accelerate Confuſion and Civil War: This is to aſſure ſuch public Enemies of this Country, that they will be conſidered and treated as Wretches unworthy to live, and will be made the firſt Victims of our juſt Reſentment.

The PEOPLE.

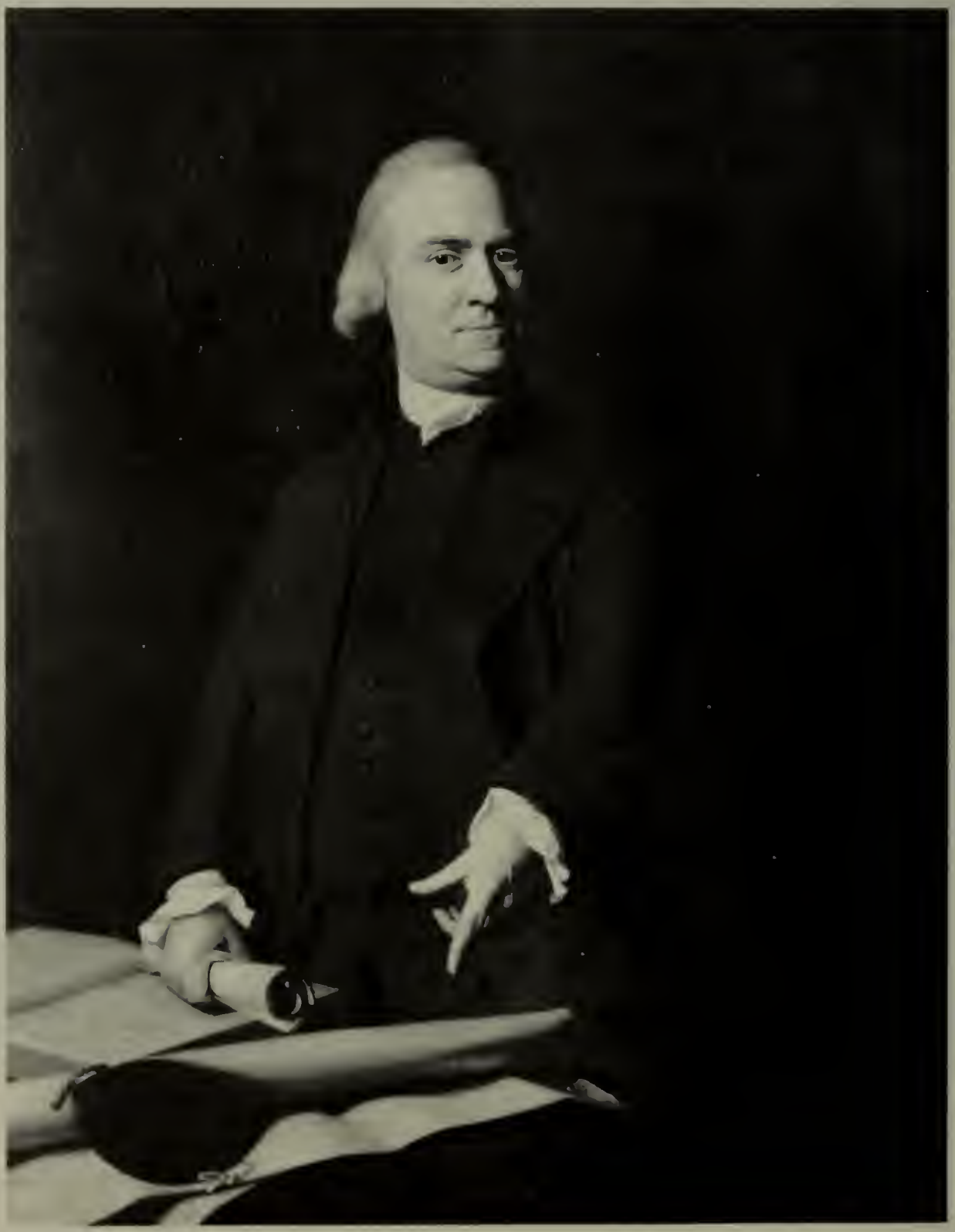
N. B. Captain *Bruce* is arrived laden with the ſame deteſtable Commodity; and 'tis peremptorily demanded of him, and all concerned, that they comply with the ſame Requiſitions.

A handbill warning against landing the tea

porters were stung by criticism from the patriots at New York and Philadelphia that the Bostonians were unreliable. There could be no backing down now.

On November 28 the bluff-bowed ship *Dartmouth* worked its way into Boston Harbor with the first shipment of tea to reach America under the Company's new plan. Mass meetings immediately demanded that the consignees resign their commissions and order the vessel to return to England. Instead of complying, they took refuge at Castle William in Boston Harbor, along with the Customs Commissioners, where they were safe from the rough tactics of persuasion commonly used by the Boston mob. Since the *Dartmouth* was in the harbor, its captain had to enter both his ship and cargo at the customhouse, and neither could depart thereafter without a clearance from the Collector. The guns at Castle William commanding the channel gave assurance that the vessel would not leave without permission. Under the law, if the duties were not paid within twenty days, the tea would be landed and confiscated by the customs authorities. The patriots were convinced that once the tea was ashore the consignees would gladly pay the infamous duty, and the tea would soon find its way into the market place. Only by preventing the landing of the cargo could the patriots be certain that the duties would go unpaid. They ordered the ship *Dartmouth* to lie at Griffin's Wharf, where it was kept under guard, and when two more tea-ships arrived in early December, the *Eleanor* and the *Beaver,* they too were brought to the wharf. *Dartmouth's* tea would be eligible for seizure on December 17, and as that day approached, tension mounted throughout Boston.

In mid-December another series of mass meetings convened to demand that the ships return to England with their cargoes of tea. On the 14th Francis Rotch, son and representative of the *Dartmouth's* owner, was persuaded to ask the Customs Collector for a clearance, but that official refused on the grounds that the duties had not been paid. On December 16, the last day before the deadline, another public meeting gathered at Old South Meeting House. The people ordered Rotch to demand a pass for his vessel by Castle William from Governor Hutchinson. The Governor was then at his country seat in Milton, where he had spent most of the preceding weeks away from the mobs, and consequently he was somewhat out of touch with the sense of growing crisis at Boston. Partly for this reason, or perhaps simply because he was a stubborn man, Hutchinson refused to grant Rotch's



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

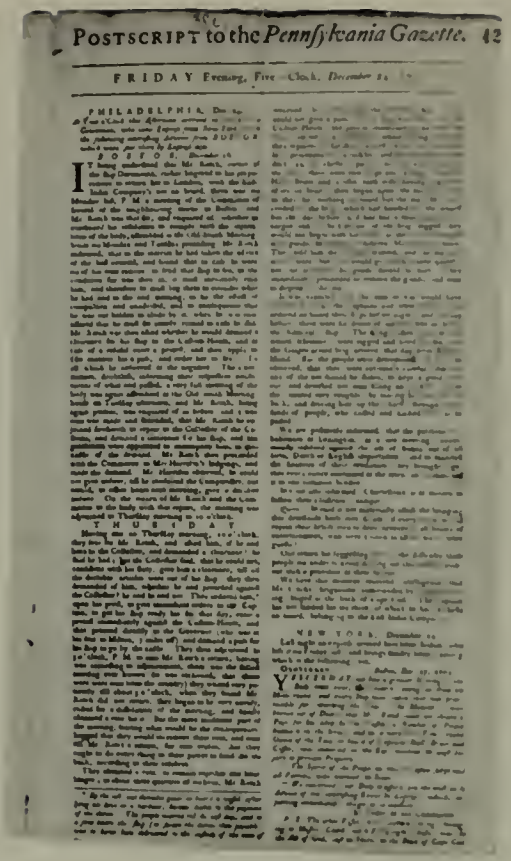
Samuel Adams

request for an exception to the rule that a ship had to be cleared first by the customhouse before being allowed to depart.

When Rotch returned to the meeting at Old South, the cold winter darkness had already fallen. The crowd was weary from the many speeches and long waiting, impatient to hear the outcome of the young man's trip to Milton. When they learned that Governor Hutchinson had refused Rotch's request for a clearance, pandemonium broke loose. Sam Adams arose to speak: "This meeting can do nothing more to save the country!" As if at a signal a warwhoop sounded at the door and was answered by another from the balcony. "Boston harbor a teapot tonight!" "Hurrah for Griffin's Wharf!" The gathering broke up, and the people streamed out into the night, shouting and whooping as they wound their way through the streets toward the waterfront. There they were met by small bands of men and boys who had come from other parts of town, all converging on Griffin's Wharf. Out of the milling crowd fifty or more men, a number of them roughly disguised as Indians, made for the three tea vessels moored alongside and climbed aboard. While some pried off the hatch-covers, others prepared block and tackle. Then the tea chests were hoisted out of the hold, broken open with axes, and their contents dumped over the rail into the dock. The ebbing tide carried much of the tea out into the harbor, but the remainder piled high alongside the vessels and had to be pushed away to make room for more. In the space of just three hours 340 chests of tea, worth about £10,000, were destroyed.

We will never know for certain who actually took part in the Boston Tea Party. But from hearsay and family tradition historians have compiled a list of over one hundred men who might have been participants. Over half of those whose occupations are known were common laborers, apprentices, or artisans. Only a small number were of the mercantile class. They were a young group, too, mostly in their early twenties, with a goodly number of teen-agers among them. The decks of the tea-ships were familiar to many of the participants who had served among the bands guarding the vessels since their arrival. Some were members of Hancock's corps of cadets; others were Masons, whose organization cancelled its meeting scheduled for that Thursday evening because of sparse attendance. Other participants, having no prior knowledge of plans to destroy the tea, simply showed up at the wharf as the patriotic thing to do or in quest of a little excitement.

And so they gathered along Boston's waterfront. Men like Thomas Melvill, who held an advanced degree from Princeton and was a young



POSTSCRIPT to the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. 42

FRIDAY Evening, Five o'Clock. December 24

PHILADELPHIA, Dec. 24.

BOSTON, December 16.

THURSDAY

NEW YORK, December 22.

Page from the Pennsylvania Gazette

A contemporary English print

businessman; men like Lendall Pitts, clerk of the market. James Brewer, a blockmarker, apparently offered his house on Summer Street as a meeting place for some of his friends. There Mrs. Brewer helped blacken their faces with burnt cork and sent them on their way. John Crane, Thomas Bolter, and Samuel Fenno, all housewrights, are said to have met at Crane's house on the corner of Hollis and Tremont streets. After joining their neighbors, the Bradlee brothers, they hastened to the waterfront. Some were young apprentices, like Peter Slater and Robert Sessions, who appeared at the wharf when they learned what was going on. Most were Bostonians, but the Tea Party probably included men from many of the neighboring towns and from as far away as Worcester. Best-known among alleged participants were William Molineux, Dr. Thomas Young, and Paul Revere. Workers, craftsmen, and merchants labored side by side that night to defend what they considered their sacred liberty.

Of course the many hundreds of inhabitants who witnessed the scene from the waterfront could thereafter tell their grandchildren that they too were "at" the Boston Tea Party. Their presence was in fact significant, for it prevented the admiral of the royal fleet at anchor in the harbor from raking Griffin's Wharf with his cannon. All British soldiers, incidentally, had been removed to Castle William out in the harbor shortly after the Boston Massacre three years before and were therefore not available to patrol the wharves. The Boston waterfront belonged to the people on that chilly December night in 1773. Neither Boston nor America would be the same thereafter.

Opposition to the East India Company's tea plan throughout America had been based almost entirely on the issue of the tax. To be sure, the smugglers in New York and Philadelphia supported the campaign because their lucrative trade was endangered. But the threat of monopoly was of secondary importance, too remote to concern most Americans. Not so the question of taxation, however, for this was an issue long familiar to all colonists in the fall of 1773. Besides, agitation during the nonimportation period had concentrated on tea as the most common of the dutied articles. Its consumption would imply acquiescence to Parliamentary taxation. No matter that many colonists had in fact drunk dutied tea before. For now the issue had a new aspect to it.

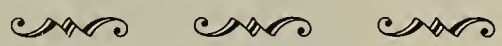
What made the plan to send dutied tea to America particularly ominous was the nature of the arrangement itself. Patriots were quick to maintain that it was a conspiracy between the Ministry and the Company to force American recognition of Parliamentary taxation. Letters from Americans in Britain and from English merchants who resented the

Frothingham's *Siege of Boston*

Boston, 1775

scheme for their own selfish reasons added credibility to the charge. Most important, however, was the fact that the colonists were willing to endorse the accusation. Many Americans had long ascribed to a devil theory of the universe. If a belief in the literal existence of Satan had died out with the witchcraft mania at the beginning of the century, the Devil's political cousin remained to haunt Americans of later generations. In short, the Company's cheap tea was bait for a trap set by the enemies of America. To accept these shipments was to admit the right of Parliament to tax the colonists.

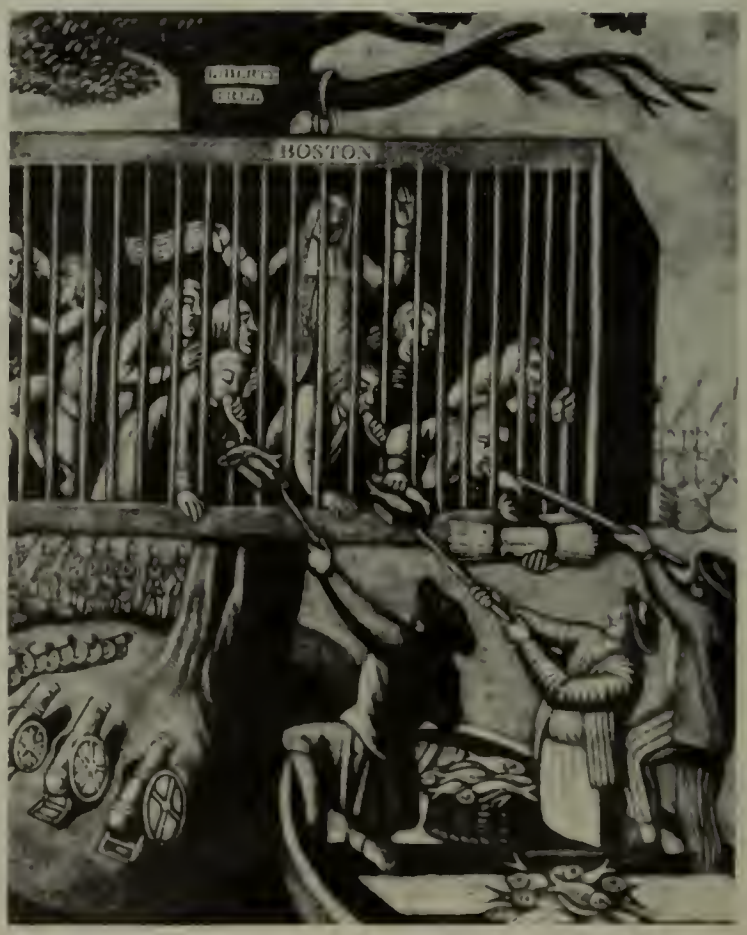
Once popular resentment had been aroused, resistance to the Company's tea followed naturally. For in most American ports violence had been a commonplace long before 1765. Thereafter harassment of stamp distributors, of merchants violating nonimportation agreements, and of overzealous customs officials met with little effective opposition from governmental authorities. In the autumn of 1773 the mere brandishing of a tar brush was generally enough to persuade the most stubborn "enemies of the people" to mend their ways. Such was the case with the tea-consignees at New York and Philadelphia. But at Boston the situation was different. There the conspiracy theory seemed particularly plausible, since the consignees were friends and relatives of the governor, and a diabolical governor at that. Hutchinson was even accused of having inspired the Tea Act in the first place. The refusal of the consignees there to resign their commissions and the governor's refusal to let the ships depart with the tea could only be ascribed to motives of the basest kind. Unwilling to permit the cargo to be landed, and with no compromise in sight, the patriots destroyed the tea.



News of the Boston Tea Party spread southward to New York and Philadelphia within a week. At both ports the consignees had already resigned, and when their tea-ships finally arrived, the patriots had little difficulty persuading the captains to return to London with their unwanted cargoes without first entering at the local customhouses. Still the governmental authorities made no effort to force the issue. At Charleston, South Carolina, the tea-ship did enter, but when the duties remained unpaid after twenty days, the cargo was confiscated by the officers and locked away for safe-keeping. Generally speaking, news of the Boston Tea Party was greeted with enthusiasm in most parts of America; those who were repulsed by this act of violence kept their opinions to themselves.

A British Cartoon:
Bostonians Paying the Excise Man

Library of Congress



A British Cartoon:
Bostonians in Distress from
the Boston Port Act

Library of Congress

When first accounts of the incident reached England in late January 1774, the reaction was different. A wave of hostility toward Boston swept the country. Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and long considered friendly to American interests, was exasperated by Boston's latest misbehavior. He recommended to the Cabinet that the port be closed until the Company was compensated for its losses and order was restored. The Ministry had long contemplated altering the charter of Massachusetts Bay to weaken the power of the elective Governor's Council. Now this and other plans for "new modeling" the provincial government were brought before Parliament. Over the opposition of a few men like Edmund Burke the Coercive Acts were adopted by overwhelming majorities.

It is not surprising that when word of Parliament's action reached America, in mid-May 1774, the cause of Boston became the common cause. That town, thought many inhabitants, was being punished for its resistance to a wicked scheme that colonists elsewhere had also opposed. The spirit of unity that erupted in the late spring of 1774 had its immeediate roots in the common agitation of the previous autumn. The enormity of the Coercive Acts quickly overshadowed the violence of the Boston Tea Party, which had been a source of private embarrassment to many moderates. Now one no longer had to condone the destruction of private property in order to defend American liberty.

The Coercive Acts had moved the dispute onto new grounds. It was now a question of whether the colonists had any rights at all in the face of Parliamentary oppression. The Port Act punished all Bostonians, innocent and guilty alike, without a hearing and without an opportunity to make restitution before the harbor was closed. The Massachusetts Government Act did violence to the sacrosanct charter itself, for it attacked the basic institutions of self-government. In short, the Coercive Acts were a display of naked power. There was no pussyfooting about virtual representation now, no attempt to make the bitter pill more palatable. Troops and frigates made such legal niceties unnecessary.

The Coercive Acts confirmed for many Americans the suspicion that the British government was in the hands of diabolical men. What happened in Massachusetts Bay would happen one by one in the other colonies as well. The alteration of one provincial charter made it more likely that changes in others were soon to follow. In the absence of a single act demonstrating their good will, the Ministry and Parliament became conspirators against the rights of all Americans. For the first time in the struggle between Great Britain and the colonies a crisis erupt-

ed that seemed to threaten freedom throughout the country. The rights of inhabitants in rural towns and counties were threatened along with those of the seaport-dwellers. And now for the first time country folk could take concrete action in defense of American liberty. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, showed their sympathy for the martyred Bostonians by donations from the produce of their farms. This action gave the people living in areas remote from the seacoast their first real sense of commitment to the cause.

That this spirit of unity was transformed into a union in fact was due partly to the vast improvement of communications between the colonies in the ten years since the Stamp Act crisis. Better roads and more newspapers meant that the resolutions of every town and county were quickly available for all to read. Establishment of formal committees of correspondence was of course a significant step, but their exchanges were supplemented by an even wider private correspondence between patriot leaders of different colonies. By the summer of 1774 Americans everywhere knew that their fellow colonists were ready for common action.

Throughout the summer the movement for a congress of delegates from all the continental colonies gained momentum as inhabitants gathered in town and county meetings to endorse the idea. Provincial conventions in each colony chose delegates and drew up instructions for their guidance. In early September the first Continental Congress met at Philadelphia. Within a few weeks it was clear that men of action were in firm control. Proposals for compromise and reconciliation with the mother country had little chance of adoption. Instead, the delegates supported Boston's refusal to pay for the tea and established the Continental Association to enforce a widespread ban on importations from the mother country in an attempt to force the repeal of all odious acts of Parliament passed since 1764. Before adjournment the Congress agreed to meet again if the crisis were not resolved by May 1775. The delegates then went home to urge their fellow colonists to prepare their defenses.

The Boston Tea Party was the catalyst that set off the revolt of the colonies. In three short hours on a cold December night in 1773 a small band of men started a chain reaction that led with little pause to the Declaration of Independence. Perhaps some other event might have had the same result. We will never know. But we do know that the Boston Tea Party had just those characteristics necessary to change the course of history. In September 1773, the vast majority of American colonists

went about their daily affairs blithely ignoring the desperate efforts of a few inhabitants to keep alive the spirit of resentment that had swept through the colonies in the years from 1765 to 1770. In September 1774, these patriots succeeded in bringing about a congress of representatives from all the major colonies and committed those delegates to a position of defiance few of them would have accepted twelve months earlier. For such a reaction to take place in so short a time required a catalyst precisely suited to the conditions around it. The Boston Tea Party was such a catalyst.

Had the Tea Party occurred at New York or Philadelphia instead, as might well have happened under slightly different circumstances, it is questionable whether the same reaction would have followed in Great Britain. The fact that the tea was destroyed at Boston made the deed doubly offensive in the minds of Britons, for Boston had long been regarded as the seat of American agitation. There the Stamp Act riots had been particularly violent. There the Customs Commissioners had been driven to refuge on Castle Island more than once. There British troops were met with open hostility. Even as news of the Tea Party reached England the Privy Council had before it the impertinent demand from Massachusetts Bay that its governor be removed from office. So bad was the town's reputation at home that many Britons attached undue significance to evidence that Bostonians were equally hated throughout the colonies. This assumption was a fatal misunderstanding, for it led the Parliament to believe that the town could be punished without arousing the sympathy of the other colonists.

Within twelve months after the Boston Tea Party the colonists had become convinced that their very freedom was at stake, and the rulers of Great Britain concluded with equal conviction that the Americans were in open rebellion. As George III said of the New England colonies in November 1774, "blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent." During the winter of 1774-75 colonists stocked up on gunpowder and went into military training, while British troops stationed in America prepared for the worst. With both sides more willing to fight than to compromise, an armed clash became inevitable. In April 1775, just sixteen months after the Boston Tea Party, the American War of Independence began on Lexington green.

BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION STAFF

Richard E. Barringer, *Executive Director*

Mary V. Darcy
Howard Iverson
Carol Ludden
Johanna McGeary

Mary Fifield
Paula Gartland
Paul Haley
Patricia Harrington
Anita Mennitto
Susan Schruth
Marcia Smith
Linda Ulchak
David Weiss